

before showing and they get purple ribbons—imagine that—a purchased, registered, expensive heifer—a purple ribbon well deserved for the child. Again the idea of the program is good but it has definitely steered away and gone in the wrong direction.

Related Studies

(examples from individual states' efforts)

Some states have started the process of gathering baseline data using the surveys and concepts developed during the National 4-H Impact Assessment Project process. Although they are in various stages of data collection, the reader may find brief descriptions of their goals and progress enlightening. We hope that reading these descriptions will inspire other states in their evaluation efforts.

Arizona

As of January 2001, Arizona is in the midst of data collection to establish a state-wide baseline to compare to the national impact assessment results. In addition to replication of the youth and adult surveys, a “club addendum” was developed that addresses issues more germane to the club delivery mode. The two-page club survey includes questions about meeting and leadership structure of the groups, perceptions about projects, skills learned in 4-H (e.g., leadership, making healthy choices, speaking skills), depth of experience, and space for specific suggestions to improve their group. Each county is collecting data on clubs and a random sample of counties will collect data on school enrichment and special interest programs. Arizona will be able to compare state-wide program results with the national results reported here. In addition, all Arizona counties that participate will be given a report so that they can compare their county’s data with the state baseline. All the materials have been translated into Spanish and pilot runs of the translations will occur in Spring 2001.

A separate volunteer survey was developed and mailed to all volunteers in the state. Data are currently being analyzed. The volunteer survey covers many topics including tasks and responsibilities, characterizations of their 4-H groups, roles of parent volunteers, youth/adult shared responsibilities, needs for and satisfaction with training, suggestions for recruitment of volunteers, other leadership roles in the community, and open-ended input regarding their perceptions of the rewards of volunteering in 4-H.

Kansas

Kansas 4-H has a public mandate to provide relevant, knowledge-based education that can predictably prepare youth for responsible citizenship in the communities it serves. The timing of the National 4-H Impact Assessment Project (N4-HIP) has been absolutely critical for the Sunflower State. Kansas State University Research and Extension including the Department of 4-H Youth Development is a partner in *Connect Kansas*, a statewide coalition of 13 agencies representing all three branches of state government, the University of Kansas, Regional Prevention Centers, Kansas Action for Children, the Kansas Children's Cabinet (disbursers of the tobacco settlement money) and our largest philanthropy, the Kansas Health Foundation. Community by community, and neighborhood by neighborhood, *Connect Kansas* is creating and supporting environments for children to become healthy and contributing members of Kansas communities. Characteristics of caring, healthy communities have been identified as the long term outcomes that are the framework for *Connect Kansas* that include but are not limited to the following: Families, youth, and citizens are part of their community's planning, decision-making, and evaluation; Families and individuals live in safe and supportive communities; Youth choose healthy behaviors; Youth successfully transition to adulthood.

The *Connect Kansas* coalition supports communities in achieving this mission in three ways:

- 1) Supporting efforts on a solid foundation of research and evaluation;
- 2) Supporting outcome-based community planning; and
- 3) Supporting community capacity building.

A study of state-wide, coordinated programming across the United States (Garross, 2000) indicated that of the 16 states currently engaged in these activities, no Extension Services were identified as partners except Kansas. Extension has been recognized by Kansans in marketing surveys conducted by Fleishman & Hillard as the principal source of credible information addressing youth, families and communities. If passed by the 2001 Kansas Legislature, the *Connect Kansas* outcomes will become state-wide norms and funding proposals for block grants or funds from all of state government and the private entities will be applied for on a uniform application that will require the applicants to address the science-based program methods they will use and their impacts on the *Connect Kansas* outcomes.

It is a two-edged sword to be a partner in this major statewide effort. First, it places K-State Research and Extension Youth, Family and

Community Development programs in an excellent position to provide additional technical assistance with education and research. On the other hand, it requires us to be more accountable for our public stewardship of appropriated funds. Twenty of our most populated counties and another twenty-five of our most sparsely populated, cash-strapped counties are placing increased pressures on local Extension Council's to justify their budget requests based on promising approaches and best practices that support these nine, long-term outcomes. 4-H youth development can no longer rely on anecdotal measurements, testimonials or merely program inputs (quantified lists of our efforts) because they do not reflect with scientific validity or reliability how 4-H youth development participation makes a difference in the youth and adults who participate. It also no longer allows us to hide behind the numbers of the school-enrichment delivery method to address issues of inclusion. The long-term, continuous contact, mentor relationship between an adult and a small group of youth, working together to learn and master new knowledge and skills, and be recognized for this mastery is our best youth development environment. It is best because it allows for the application and integration of all eight Critical Elements of 4-H Youth Development, the first output from the N4HIP. We want to measure true youth development that prepares youth for adulthood and engages them in the community. We are moving beyond programming around prevent by recognizing that "problem free is not fully prepared and fully prepared is not fully engaged" (Pittman, 2000).

The Critical Elements of 4-H Youth Development have permitted K-State Research and Extension to build a partnership with the Research & Extension Office of Community Health. This partnership has helped us shift our evaluative strategies from program delivery and trying to measure and account for the extraneous variables in the innumerable array of specific knowledge and behaviors to a more holistic accounting of a Healthy Place. The Healthy Place framework is the contemporary model for public health, used by the Center for Disease Control (CDC) and the National Institutes of Health (NIH). It is an ecological approach that goes beyond a risk/protective factors or the Search Institute assets approach for measuring community effectiveness in supporting youth development. Healthy Places allows us to document the healthy choices 4-H participants, older and younger, make as a result of their participation as 4-H venues. The Critical Elements of 4-H Youth Development can be summarized into four characteristics that we are looking for in 4-H youth development environments:

- Connection: People need a place where they feel connected and have a sense of belonging.
- Skill Building: People need a place there they can build skills and demonstrate those skills.

- Autonomy: People need a place where they are free to make decisions for themselves, permitting them to learn from their successes and failures.
- Healthy Norms: People need healthy behavior norms, healthy examples or to be in places that intentionally encourage healthy choices.

The body of research behind the Critical Elements of 4-H Youth Development and the Healthy Places Framework is fully integrated and acknowledges the best works of social scientists.

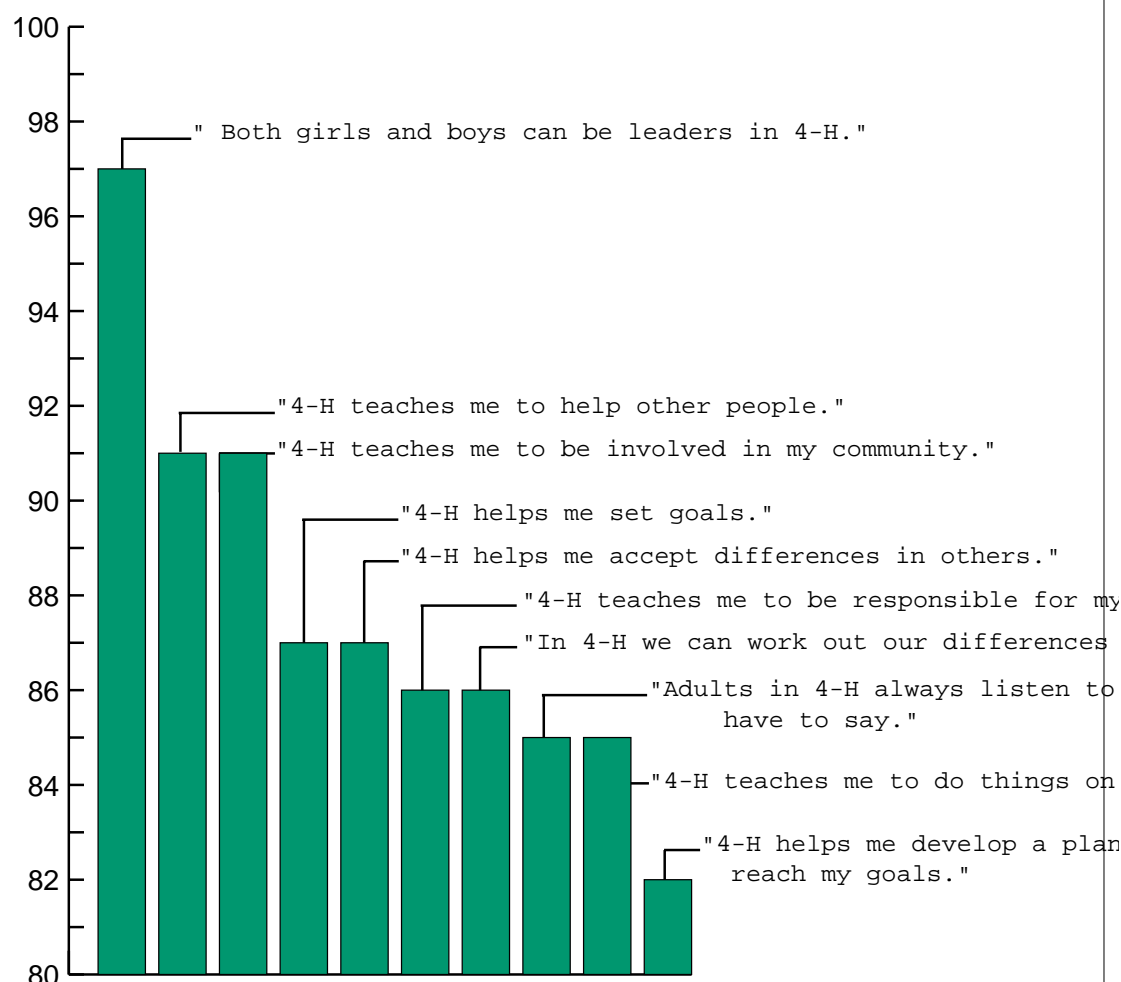
Finally, K-State Research and Extension has prepared several tools to assist our professionals in reviewing their 4-H venues in the context of the Critical Elements/Healthy Framework models. Grids have been developed that link popular 4-H youth development learning strategies (i.e. events & activities, club traditions, etc.) to a *Connect Kansas* outcome. We have also created a matrix that translates the various popular brands of assessment such as Communities that Care (Hawkins & Catalano) and Developmental Assets (The Search Institute) along with the Critical Elements of 4-H Youth Development so they can be better prepared to communicate with collaborators using differing frameworks and more successful in writing grant proposals to various sources that are unfamiliar with 4-H youth development. Our most recent success is an Agricultural Experiment Station (AES) Request for Proposals (RFP) that will allow us to not only replicate the National 4-H Impact Assessment Project in Kansas, but will create a design to investigate the relationships, if any, between the Critical Elements of 4-H Youth Development. This work will begin in May 2001. Finally, faculty, staff and volunteer development programs now emphasize the characteristic of the Critical Elements of 4-H Youth Development and additional aids will be prepared or revised to assist leaders, staff and faculty in creating rich learning environments that are Healthy Places.

Missouri

In Fall 1999, Missouri 4-H Youth Development county faculty were trained to administer the survey. A stratified, random sampling process was used to insure that the results were generalizable to the entire state and comparable with the national results. The survey was administered to 4-H club members in 4th through 12th grades at 4-H club meetings held in late 1999 and early 2000. Adults attending the meetings were also asked to complete a version of the survey. All told, 782 adults and 920 youth in Missouri 4-H clubs were surveyed, representing 29 counties and 79 clubs.

Although Missouri was not selected as one of the pilot or sample states for the National 4-H Impact Assessment project, Extension and 4-H administration decided to replicate the club member portion of the national study in Missouri. Resources were committed including state and county faculty time, training support, printing, mailing and data analysis expenses.

Results of the study indicate that Missouri 4-H has a very positive impact on club members. Young people overwhelmingly report positive relationships with caring adults as well as feelings of belonging and acceptance. They report that 4-H helps them in learning new things, in planning,



Percentage of 4-H'ers who agreed or strongly agreed with the each st

goal-setting and decision-making. Finally, 4-H has helped them be a leader and taught them that volunteering is important. Some preliminary findings include:

Plans call for the Missouri findings to be used and communicated in a variety of ways such as staff training for program application and improvement, 2000 Missouri 4-H Annual Report, and a Missouri 4-H Impact Assessment research report.

Montana

Montana has taken several steps to conduct research and create awareness and interest in the critical elements for positive youth development. After the work of the critical elements work group in St. Louis in 1998, Montana staff developed a descriptive handout on the critical elements to further explain and clarify how to operationalize the eight critical elements. The motivations for creating such a handout came from several requests received by professionals in Ohio and other states to help field staff understand how to apply the eight critical elements in their day-to-day work. Montana 4-H specialist Dr. Kirk Astroth, one of the members of the critical elements work group, developed an elaboration of each of the eight elements.

The purpose of the 9-page handout was to begin the process of answering the question: “What is the link between the eight critical elements and what we’re doing at the local level in 4-H?” In addition, the handout was developed to help youth professionals explain the eight elements to others and provide a ways to teach them to other youth development professionals and volunteer leaders.

Each one-page descriptor provided the work group’s definition of the critical element, questions to consider about the importance of the element, ways youth professionals can support and foster the element in their work, sample assessment questions that can be used with youth and adults to determine whether the element is present in their group, and finally some examples of programs and curricula related to fostering the element that can be used to train others.

In addition, Montana 4-H has recently concluded a statewide impact assessment research project of its own called the “MSU Extension Survey of Students’ Out-of-School Time.” The purpose of this study was to learn more about how students spend time outside of school hours, to learn if there were correlates between out-of-school involvement and risk/protective factors, and if youngsters involved in 4-H for a certain period of time were different from students who have never been in 4-H. Twenty-four counties were randomly selected for the research project, and then within each county two school districts were also randomly selected for the study. In total, approximately 2,500 students in the 5th, 7th and 9th grades were surveyed. The survey instrument was designed in collaboration with a research/advisory team of seven campus-based research faculty from four colleges at Montana State University. The survey tool consists of 74 questions, including 12 that only those who have been in 4-H answer. Questions are both qualitative and quantitative. Some of the questions are taken from the National 4-H Impact Assessment project, but we

incorporated other questions from the Search Institute's survey of student attitudes, from the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, from the New York 4-H Club Survey, and a number of original questions were developed with input from county agents and program staff here in Montana. The survey instrument was pilot-tested revised numerous times.

The data from the returned surveys has been entered by research staff at the MSU College of Nursing's Center for Research and Creativity. Data analysis in partnership with research faculty in the College of Health and Human Development has been completed. Preliminary results from this study include the following:

- Montana 4-H kids are more likely than other kids to succeed in school, to be involved as leaders in their school and the community, to be looked up to as role models by other kids.
- Montana 4-H kids are less likely than other kids to shoplift or steal, to use illegal drugs of any kind to get high, to ride in a car with someone else who has been drinking, to smoke cigarettes, to damage property for the fun of it, and to skip school or cut classes without permission.

South Dakota

Carolyn Clague collected additional data for her dissertation research utilizing the surveys of the national impact project. The critical elements with the highest ratings by both youth and adults associated with South Dakota clubs and special interest groups were the opportunity to value and practice service for others. Engagement in learning also received particularly high ratings. Youth and adults perceived that helping others is a way for them to share their practical and technical skills, develop leadership skills and increase their self-esteem. The differences between youth and adult perceptions in the national results were not seen in the South Dakota sample. Her conclusions include the recommendation that 4-H youth development programs should include the critical elements to increase program effectiveness.

Survey Reveals Areas of Need for Improvement

During the pilot phase and national data collection phase, the National Impact Assessment Planning Committee received feedback from participating agents and state offices that indicated certain issues which, if addressed, could

improve the task of national data collection. The following *two* issues were specifically noted during the data collection phase: inconsistency in reporting for ES-237 data (e.g., whether an activity was considered a “special interest program” or another delivery mode) and lack of identity or “4-H brand recognition,” particularly with one-shot or school enrichment programs (e.g., when adults and youth don’t consider themselves to be in 4-H and therefore were reluctant to complete the surveys). While we will not fully address these two issues here beyond pointing them out, we will use some of the item responses from the survey as further indications of areas for program improvement. Of particular note was the differences between youth and adult perceptions on these items.

Adults in 4-H, critical elements in and of themselves, were generally seen in a positive light by the youth. However, a couple of items showed that the idealized relationship (that of partners in egalitarian decision making and leadership roles) doesn’t always occur.

| <i>Adult in 4-H Items</i> | <i>Youth responses</i> | <i>Adult responses</i> |
|---|------------------------|------------------------|
| <i>“Adults in 4-H see problems from a kid’s point of view.”</i> | 37 (9) | 16 (2) |
| <i>“Adults in 4-H include me in big decisions.”</i> | 28 (8) | 20 (3) |

(Strongly Disagree + Disagree percentages are reported first with Strongly Disagree percentages in parentheses)

Even though youth felt positively about the adults in 4-H overall, there appears to be room for improvement in the area of shared decision making. Note that the adults did not necessarily see these items as particular problems. These results echo one of the conclusions of an Illinois 4-H evaluation (Seitz, Roegge & Seibold, 2000) that reported youth wanting more autonomy in leading the club.

Contrary to the overall positive trends regarding *Feelings About 4-H*, nearly one quarter of the youth respondents disagreed (4% strongly disagreed) with the statement, “In 4-H I can try new things without worrying about making mistakes.” Although they consistently agreed that they DID try new things and they FELT SAFE to try new things, it was not to the point where all would say that they did not worry about making mistakes. In contrast, less than 3% of the adults reported that they disagreed with this item.

One item that was deliberately included in *Learning in 4-H* also had almost one quarter of the students disagreeing (5% strongly disagreed) with the statement: “I often teach others in 4-H.” Only 2% of the adults disagreed. One could argue that adults have a broader conception of what it means to teach others, but it is also important to help the youth have more opportunities to teach others as this can improve their sense of mastery and engagement in learning.

Lastly, a few items related to *Belonging in 4-H* deserve a closer look. Again, note that the majority of items in this category yielded strong positive responses. These specific items, however, may indicate ways in which 4-H programs can retain youth at a time when many drop-outs occur.

| <i>Belonging in 4-H Items</i> | <i>Youth responses</i> | <i>Adult responses</i> |
|---|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| <i>“My best friends are in 4-H.”</i> | 33 (11) | 27 (2) |
| <i>“In 4-H, both boys and girls treat each other with respect.”</i> | 15 (5) | 5 (0) |
| <i>“Other 4-H kids care about me.”</i> | 16 (6) | 2 (0) |

(Strongly Disagree + Disagree percentages are reported first with Strongly Disagree percentages in parentheses)

Both youth and adults reported that “best friends” are not always together in 4-H. Perhaps this is a reason why some youth drop out of 4-H. If their best friends are not involved with 4-H, 4-Hers may decide to leave 4-H in order to spend more time with them. Similarly, if some youth don’t feel like they or others are treated with respect, or that other kids don’t care about them, they will not feel encouraged to continue in 4-H programs. Keep in mind that better than 80% of the youth actually agree with the last two items, so this is not in any way a pervasive problem. On the other hand, because 4-H strives to provide inclusive, positive environments for all youth, 16% disagreement with these items may be of practical significance. The large differences between youth and adult perceptions on these items may also signify an area for improvement.

Further Indications from the Multiple Classification Analysis Results

When age made a difference in the youth responses, the typical pattern was for 13-14 year olds to have the lowest ratings compared to other age groups. Although very consistent with other research results of many studies of this age group, this does remind us that this particular age group deserves special attention. This might also be a “critical period” for enrollment in 4-H as a number of youth drop out at this time. Local programs should examine

this particular relationship in order to determine if it is especially relevant for their communities.

The lower ratings for after-school programs may reflect the fact that many programs are not “purely” 4-H and have to address preferences that may depart from the typical offerings in 4-H programs. For example, if a local community prefers that the time spent in the after-school program be focused on the completion of school assignments rather than on expanding the youths’ experiential exposure to new topics and activities, the ratings on this type of survey might reflect the reality of the program.

That race/ethnicity only made a difference in two critical elements (adults, helping others) shows particular need for the suggestions about improving the youth-adult partnership to be implemented with youth of diverse backgrounds.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The National 4-H Impact Assessment Project has constructed a potentially useful instrument to help local and state 4-H programs answer the question, “What positive outcomes are related to critical elements of the 4-H experience?” Local programs are able to adapt the survey to their specific needs by selecting the most appropriate sets of critical elements and combining the questions with a set of targeted outcomes. This is currently happening in several states. The ultimate utility of the national data will be seen when more states are able to compare their results with the national data. Furthermore, the results can be useful for strategic planning efforts such as “The Power of Youth in A Changing World -- JUMP AT THE CHANCE.” The critical elements clearly relate to such themes as the Power of Youth (shared leadership and decision making), Access, Equity & Opportunity (diversity issues), Extraordinary Place to Learn (mastery and opportunities to learn), and Exceptional People and Innovative Practices (volunteerism).

Some general results have been noted that show the promise of 4-H as well as the potential utility of the national survey results. In particular, the results show an overall very positive view of 4-H particularly in critical elements of positive youth development such as belonging (inclusive environment), physical and emotional safety, and positive relationship with a caring adult. 4-H also helps students in planning and decision making, learning to value and practice service for others, and learning new things.

There is always room for improvement, especially in an organization

whose motto is “To Make the Best Better.” In this spirit, it seems reasonable to consider more ways for adults in 4-H to significantly and sincerely involve youth in decision making. Youth leaders are likely to feel involved in the “big” decisions but other youth need to be included as well. Perhaps recruitment activities could encourage youth to bring their “best” friends to sample 4-H activities and to encourage youth in all 4-H activities to develop caring relationships among the members. These positive social relationships can also influence youth comfort with trying new things without worrying about making mistakes. Encouraging them and providing plenty of opportunities for them to teach others can also have a positive impact on caring for others within the group.

These are baseline, national results that may change over time. Clearly, youth and adults feel that the 4-H experience includes many of the critical elements of positive youth development programs. The next step is to combine the critical elements more explicitly with locally relevant, clearly specified outcomes. This national 4-H survey provides the tool for such efforts but is only the first step toward developing an on-going process of evaluating the impact of the 4-H Youth Development Program nationwide. Additional resources need to be solicited to build the infrastructure necessary for such sustained efforts.

